



# THE NATIONAL PREACHER, And Village Pulpit.

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Vol. III.—New Series.]      DECEMBER, 1860.      [No. 12.—Whole No. 732.

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## SERMON XXXII.

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### THE VALUE OF FIFTY-TWO SABBATHS IN THE YEAR.

"The Sabbath was made for man."—MARK 2: 27.

AND like every other divine arrangement, it is full of benevolence towards man. It is replete with good, and with no evil. No individual is made the worse by observing it as it was designed that it should be observed; there is no one that might not be made better and happier by it; there is no family that keeps it in a proper manner into which it brings disease, or poverty, or discord, or tears, or vice; there is none which it does not contribute to purify and elevate; there is no neighborhood, city, nation, which is not made more orderly, intelligent, and happy by its observance; none that now desecrates the day that might not derive important advantages by regarding it as a season of sacred rest.

The last Sabbath of another year is closing. A few moments of its light yet linger in our land, and in a brief period the last

Sabbath of the year will have closed on twenty millions in our country; on nine hundred millions of immortal beings on the earth. Can there be a more appropriate employment, as its beams linger and play on the city of our habitation, and on the spires and mountain-summits of our land, than to improve its last moments with reflections suitable to the end of such an unusual occurrence of our lives, as the closing of the Sabbath and of the year together? Let us notice the thoughts suggested by these two topics: The Sabbaths of a year, and the fact that they are closing.

I. The Sabbaths of a year. Perhaps we may find something in these words that may be worthy of serious reflection. If we do, it will be in the amount of time thus set apart in a year for a specified purpose; the design for which it is set apart; the place which it occupies amidst the other days of the year.

(1) The amount of time which is thus set apart for a specific purpose. From the year, itself a brief period, there is abstracted for the purposes of the Sabbath one seventh part of the whole—fifty-two days—almost two entire months. Perhaps we may, in some respects, best estimate the value of this time, by supposing that it were continuous time, taken together from any one period of the year, instead of being distributed along in small portions through the whole. To see its value, then, it may be proper to inquire what could be accomplished during those fifty-two days in a year, in the ordinary employments in which men are engaged; and perhaps some estimate of their value may be obtained by considering what might have been gained by them if they had been devoted to the usual pursuits of life. I refer to this estimate now, on the supposition that in reference to the prosecution of the ordinary pursuits of life with vigor and with profit and with health, it makes no difference as to the other days of the year, whether these fifty-two days are devoted to worldly occupations or to religion. Let us see, then, by what rules, according to this mode of estimation, their value is to be measured.

The day-laborer, the mechanic, the farmer, would estimate their value by what he has been able to earn on fifty-two other days of the year; and that is what the Sabbaths of the year would be worth to him in the ordinary way in which he estimates the value of time. If he has at other times earned one dollar a day, the Sabbath, on this supposition, has taken fifty-two dollars from the sum total of his earnings during the year; that is, the law of religion, and the customs of the community, have cost him this sum. If on an average on other days he has earned five dollars a day, the tax on his earnings by keeping the Sabbath has been swelled to more than two hundred and fifty dollars. The merchant, on this principle, will multiply the average of his gains on the other days of the year by this number, fifty-two, and this will show him

how much the Sabbath ought in some way to be worth to him. The professional man will inquire what was the amount of his earnings on any other fifty-two days, and what they might have been on these; the traveler, how far he might have proceeded on his journey; the student, how many more books of classic-learning, or law, or medicine, or history, he might have read in fifty-two continuous days; the votary of pleasure, how much more might have been enjoyed if the theaters had been open, and if the customs of the community had sanctioned parties and dances on those days now kept as sacred time.

Now, on the supposition on which we are now proceeding, that a man could do as much work, perform as much study, or taste the sweets of pleasure as much on the other days of the year if he did not observe a Sabbath, its value to any one, in this point of view, must be estimated by what those days would have been worth to him in the ordinary employments of his life; and that is the pecuniary price or tax which he pays for the observance of the Sabbath. I believe, indeed, that this estimate is to be materially modified by the fact that the proper observance of a day of rest is really no loss to man as a laborer, or a student, or a traveler, or in the lawful enjoyments of life, but that in fact the remainder of the year is worth more to him in these respects than it would be if it were a period of continuous labor without any interruption or rest; but still this is the pecuniary value which is to be fixed upon the time as such. This would be the way in which any other fifty-two days would be estimated, if, for example, a man were required to leave his farm and engage in the duties of a soldier or a juror. And it is a fair inquiry before a man who keeps the Sabbath, and who is accustomed to affix a certain value to his time, whether, as the Sabbath is actually employed, it is in fact worth to him as much as these dollars would be which he might have earned; or as the progress which he might have made in his journey, his studies, or his pleasures, would have been. In making this calculation, it would indeed be proper to consider how much he owed to it on the other days of the week on the score of health, and vigor, and general happiness; and, also, whether he has not other interests of as much value as pecuniary interests, which have been promoted by this; in other words, whether the fifty-two days could have been more profitably employed than they have been by one in the circumstances in which we have been, and with the interests which we have to secure; for it is in some proper sense a fair inquiry what these fifty-two days that have been abstracted from the ordinary employments of life, and in which those employments have been suspended, have been worth to him. And that would be one way of determining whether the appointment of the Sabbath is a wise or an unwise appointment.

I have aimed in this way to show you the value of the Sab-

bath, by supposing that those fifty-two days had been taken together from any one portion of the year, and by applying to them the ordinary measure by which we determine the value of our time. Now, on this way of estimating these days, it is clear that they should not have been spent without securing to us something in actual value that would be in fact a compensation for the tax or price which we have paid for the Sabbath. It is clear that they might have been turned to great account. Suppose you were to take any continuous fifty-two days to read the Bible, and to pray, and to pursue a careful inquiry into the state of your opinions on religion. Suppose you were to take the entire two months of the new year that is to open upon us to devote to a serious inquiry whether you are prepared to die. Suppose you were to devote them to the single purpose of becoming a Christian—by withdrawing from the world, suspending your business, excluding yourself from all amusements or cares that would distract the mind—can you have any reasonable doubt that in that time you could prepare to meet God, and could lay a good foundation for eternal life? I think that no one could reasonably doubt that in that period, by careful study and prayer, he could settle the inquiry to his own satisfaction about the life to come. And yet the Sabbaths distributed through the weeks of the year would furnish just as much time for this as in the case supposed, and would have greater advantages with reference to this end than if taken as continuous time from any one portion of the year. And can you have any reasonable doubt that if you had given your minds to a careful preparation for heaven during the Sabbaths of this whole year, with such attention as you might have bestowed on the subject on the other days of the week without interfering with your worldly business in any way, you might have been this day a true Christian—a child of God—an heir of heaven?

(2.) These thoughts will have additional impressiveness if we consider a second circumstance—the place of the Sabbath—the manner in which your Sabbaths have been scattered along among the other days of the year. It is easy to conceive, on the supposition that God had intended to set apart such a portion of time as one seventh to be kept holy, that that period might have been taken as a continuous period, either, say at the beginning, or at the close of the year—either at the end of the year, to reflect on the past, and to gather up the lessons which so many successive days might have suggested to the mind, and to rest after so long uninterrupted labor; or at the beginning of the year, to prepare man for so long a period of unbroken toil. One ignorant of what man is, and man wants, or one unskilled as to the actual working of any such system, would have done this as Mohammed designated an entire month to be observed as a month of fasting—with infinite inconvenience to all who attempt to observe it. But the divine arrange-

ment has been different, and it may be well to dwell a moment on that arrangement as one of wisdom and benevolence.

(a) What, then, is the fact in regard to the wisdom and the benevolence of this arrangement? It will be clearly seen in these things:

The Sabbaths have been distributed along through the year when the mind and the body needed rest: at intervals sufficiently near, and sufficiently remote, if not to meet an essential law of our nature, yet, as all experience shows, adapted to the best state of the bodily health, to the best exercise of the mental powers, and to the accomplishment of the most possible by the labor of the body and the mind; for nothing is now better established than that if man wishes to make much of life, he will not be a loser, but a gainer, by observing days of rest occurring at about the periods designated by the Christian Sabbath. This purpose would not have been secured by the observance of a continuous period of rest at any one portion of the year.

The Sabbaths have been distributed along by this arrangement in such a manner that nothing that is valuable is interrupted by it. The period of the Sabbath, compared with the whole of the week, is so short that it constitutes no interference with the regular business of life. This could not have occurred by the designation of a long, continuous period. The adjournment of a court for fifty-two days; the suspension of the labors of farming; the occurring of such a period in the season of sowing or harvesting; the closing of all stores and all shops of mechanics; the suspension of all travel — any one can see how impracticable this would have been, or how it would have interfered with the regular business of human life. As it is, the taking of this amount of time from the year, really interrupts nothing. The farmer is not so interrupted that he can not sow or gather his grain; the merchant, that he can not regularly prosecute his business; the mechanic, that he can not carry on his regular employment; the traveler, that he can not pursue his journey; the student, that he can not resume with freshness his lesson where it was suspended; the courts, that they can not take up a cause at the point where the testimony was arrested; and the advocate, that his argument when resumed will not be as impressive as if it had not been suspended. These days have been distributed along when, perhaps, but for such an interruption, some powerful vice or evil habit would have obtained a hold which could not have been dislodged from the soul. At the end of every six days there has been an arresting of such worldly and evil influences, and the incipient habit has been broken, and time has been given for reflection, and the mind, perhaps unconsciously to itself, has been brought under other and holier influences. Were there no other good in the case, it is much in the cause of virtue to break in upon any forming habit of evil in every



seven days, and no man knows how much he owes to that one simple fact in the formation of his own character.

The Sabbaths of the year are so distributed as not to be tedious. The day when it occurs is long enough as a season of rest; not so long as to become necessarily irksome. As man is now constituted, you could hardly calculate that a season of religious rest could become otherwise than tedious by the long, continuous period of something like two months, nor could you then well meet the complaint of ancient avarice: "When will the Sabbath be gone that we may set forth wheat?" (Amos 8: 5.) As it is, the Sabbath need not be a wearisome or irksome period of human life. If it is, it is because men choose to make it so. Its grateful rest comes in when there has been so much of turmoil and toil, and when the powers are so much exhausted, as to make it needful; it has enough in which the heart may be interested to occupy all its moments; and its fast-fleeing hours are gone before they necessarily become irksome, and as soon as man could reasonably desire to return again to the business or the pleasures of this life.

(b) Now, this arrangement has been continued along in our journey of life through another year. No man's business has been injuriously broken in upon; no court has been adjourned with detriment to the interests of justice; no student has suspended his duties with damage to himself; no mechanic has closed his place of business with any loss to his customers or to himself; and no man has been laid by for tedious successive weeks on his journey. No farm has remained unplowed when it was desirable to plant or sow, and no harvest has rotted in the fields because the farmer felt himself bound to keep a long period of holy time. Yet the year has been interrupted so as to comprise this whole period of fifty-two entire days. Fifty-two times the affairs of the world have been suspended by common consent all around you, to remind you that there is a God; that there is another world; that there is a place of perfect cessation from toil; and that man has higher interests than those which pertain to the present life. Fifty-two times all the courts have been suspended; the stores have been closed; the exercises in colleges and schools have been arrested; the apprentice has been released from toil; the hired laborer has ceased to be bound by his contract to work; and the slave has had no task, and has felt that, to some extent, the time was his own, and that he too might think of heaven. Fifty-two times the axe of the woodman has ceased to be heard, and the noise of the spindle and the loom has died away, and the plow has been left standing in the furrow. Fifty-two times during the year you have been solicited to take up your Bible and to search diligently after truth; fifty-two days have you been invited to the sanctuary; through fifty-two days you have had nothing else to do but to prepare for heaven.

(3.) These thoughts may be more deeply impressed on the mind if we consider for a moment the design for which this day has been set apart. Its great purpose can be easily understood—can not well be mistaken. It is based on these truths: (a) That man has other and higher interests than those which pertain to this life. Who can doubt this? Who can doubt that those interests demand the careful attention of man? Yes, there are other ends for which to live than gain and pleasure and honor. We are all made for other purposes than these. These must be the smallest things pertaining to our welfare as creatures traveling to eternity. (b) That it is desirable to make the heart better and holier. The Sabbath pertains primarily to the heart. The intellect, the world, the wharf, the exchange, the "shop," the courts, the money-tables—these have enough of our time through the week. It is well to devote one day to the heart, to the temper, to the affections, to self-government, to the entire contemplation of higher realities, to the enlargement and the purifying of the domestic affections, to the subjugation of evil passions. All that tends to make the heart better, and the world happier, is appropriate to the Sabbath. All that will make me less covetous, or less envious, or less irascible, or less ambitious, or less sensual, or less hard-hearted to the calls of sacred charity; and all that I can do to make my neighbor more cheerful, if sad and in affliction, or to give light to the ignorant, or peace to the dying, is appropriate to the Sabbath. All these things are well at other times, and they should not be neglected; but in a world like this it is worth the cost of one whole day in every seven—estimate its value as you will by dollars and cents—to make the heart better, and to promote the happiness of the world. (c) And the Sabbath is *given* for these ends; for "it was made for man." It was given for this purpose under every advantage—scattered along at reasonable and convenient intervals in life; when the affairs of the world are suspended; when all is calm around you, and invites to reflection; when the hours of the day are set apart by law and by custom for this purpose; and when you are sure that such an appropriation of these hours would meet with the approbation of God, and with your own approbation when you come to review life from the bed of death. And, (d) again, it is given for no other purpose, and you have no right to employ it for any other purpose, for God commanded, saying: "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy; six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." Gain, and traffic, and study, and travel, and personal business, except for purposes of necessity and mercy, are a violation of the law of God; for he who said "thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother," said also, "remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day." Fifty-two times that command has been laid across the path of the worldly, and the

vain, and the gay, during the past year, and as many times you have been reminded that God claimed that *that* time should be devoted to him.

II. These days are ending. The sun is setting. But a few moments more of its light linger around us, and then the Sabbaths and all the other days of the year will be gone. Let us dwell a few moments on the fact that these days are closing, and in view of that ask, in this impressive moment, how they have been spent.

To some these Sabbaths have been among the most pleasant parts of their lives. The happiest moments of the year have been on this holy day; the hours which the mind would desire should be the last that should fade from the memory, if a time should come when that mind was to forget all things, would be those precious hours. The influences upon the heart most desirable to be retained, have been those which have proceeded from the observance of this day of holy rest, and the principal sorrow in the recollection of the departed days of the year is, that those holy seasons are past—a sorrow, however, which finds alleviation—as the sorrow for no other departed joys does—in the assurance that if life is prolonged that joy will certainly be renewed again; or, if life should be soon arrested, that they have been but the foretaste of the joys of the eternal Sabbath.

But is this so with all persons? Is it so with all who are professing Christians? Have we who bear the Christian name made as much of the Sabbaths of this year as we might have done for our own improvement, for our growth in grace, for prayer, for the study of the word of God, in doing good in our families, and in the world? Are there not solemn records against us for wasted hours, and for neglected duties, and for a bad example, and for unprofitable reading and conversation? Are there no records against us for what our Master regards as violations of that day; for pursuits of worldliness and sin?

But let me seriously ask of all here who are not professing Christians, to recall now the manner in which you have spent the Sabbaths of the year, and especially in view of the thoughts which I have suggested as to its design—the fact that so large a portion of the year has been separated from other time by the law of God and the customs of the community; that that time so separated has been distributed along through the year, in a manner best adapted to promote the end of the institution and to produce the happiest effects on your own minds; and that the design of the day has been to make the heart better, and to prepare for another state of being. The fair question now is, whether these designs and ends have been accomplished? Or, which is the same thing, whether you can suppose that God would designate such a day with a view to your accomplishing those things in which you have been engaged in during the Sabbaths of the year? What the em-



ployment of these portions of the year has been, you best know yourselves, and whether the recollection of the manner in which you have spent the sacred hours be that which is best fitted to give peace, on a review of life, you best can tell. If the business of the world has been pursued with as much zest and greediness on that day as on any other; if you have pursued your journeys without even pausing to show outward respect for the day; if the affairs of the world have been only nominally suspended, while your heart has been in it, and you have been forming plans of worldliness still; if you have secretly stolen into your counting-rooms to write your letters; if you have prosecuted your professional studies, or have only laid aside your professional books to read those of a lighter and more attractive kind; if it has been a day to do up the small business of the week; if it has been a day of amusement, in which, relieved from toil, you have sought mere relaxation; if it has been a day of almost insupportable tediousness because you have no love for its appropriate employments, and you have been constrained to show an outward respect for it; if you have habitually and deliberately neglected your Bible, and offered no prayer on that day; or if, instead of improving its hours to make your heart better, you have only abused them to make it worse—then doubtless you can recall all these things to-day, and this is a proper hour to judge whether that has been the wisest and the best method of spending these fifty-two days. They are gone. They can not now be recalled. But you can ask yourself whether these days were not designed for other and holier objects than these, and whether they might not have been spent in a manner better adapted to promote the great ends of human life.

A few moments of the light of the closing Sabbath of the year yet linger. The last evening of the year comes on. The evening of the year is not an inappropriate time for calm reflection—for oh! how does it remind us all that the last evening of life hastens on—that the night cometh when, all our days ended, “no man can work!”

The Sabbath and the year are closing together. What interest is there in dwelling on the last departing moments—on the events of the year? How solemn to end these Sabbaths—to end this year! How solemn will it be to end all our Sabbaths—all our years! What recollections crowd upon us in view of the past! What thoughts press upon us in the anticipation of what is to come! What scenes have we passed through! What scenes may be before us! How the memory of sickness, and trouble, and disappointment, and bereavement, comes over many a heart to-day! How deep a sorrow perhaps would fall upon us if we knew what is to be on the next year! How the image of a dear, departed friend that began the year with us in this house, rises before the memory! With what intense interest, with what deep and unutterable

feelings, might we look upon the friend at our side, if we knew what is to come!

Another year is about to open—to some of us the last year of life; to many a year of privilege, of prosperity, and of happiness. To those of us who live, it will be another year of probation. It will have its Sabbaths and its sanctuary privileges. It will meet us to-morrow morning in a land of freedom and of Christian refinement and enjoyment. It will hold out to us the Bible still as a “lamp to our feet and a light to our paths;” it will set before us, from time to time, a preached gospel; it will appeal to us, by a thousand arguments and influences, to live unto God, and to prepare for a vast eternity. Its light, when it dawns upon us, should fill us with joy; its days should be improved in a careful preparation for the life to come; its Sabbaths, as they pass along, should be spent so as to promote purity of heart and a fitness for “the rest that remaineth for the people of God.” God grant that it may be a year replete to each one of you with abundant blessings—a year of health and prosperity and peace—a year of fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ—a year when heavenly influences will descend on all your families—a year crowned with blessings to the Church, to our common country, to the world!

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## SERMON XXXIII.

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### THE CHURCH-GOING BELL.\*

“WHEN the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.”—Exod. 19 : 13.

EVIDENCES are very numerous in the Scripture that God is pleased when his people worship him in sincerity and truth. If we look as far back as the time when Abel was offering up a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain; if we see Enos and his associates calling themselves by the name of the Lord; if we see the patriarchs and their children standing around rude altars of stone, waiting for the fulfillment of covenant promises—we shall find the divine smile overhanging the worshipers; we shall then be prepared to hear a voice from above distinctly saying: “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” And

\* Preached the first Sabbath after the hanging of a new bell.

when an obedience to this voice was scarcely yet commenced, we are not surprised to hear again: "Then I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory, and I will dwell among them, and will be their God." And then a little later it will not be strange if we hear the same awful voice saying: "Ye shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary, and I will walk among you and will be your God, and ye shall be my people." Nothing has been more distinct in the manifestations of the divine will to men than that God delights in the public worship which his people render to him.

And so, in respect to the worshippers, it is very evident that great benefits have thus been secured. They have thus obtained such a joy and satisfaction as they have found in nothing else. Do we need to refer to instances? The experience of the Psalmist was very likely not different than that of many who went before, and who followed after him, when he said: "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth." "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord." "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple." He seems to have had such a blessed experience amid the scenes of public worship, that he could say: "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." He said he was glad when they said unto him: "Let us go into the house of the Lord."

The same blessed experience is found under the new dispensation. When the disciples had witnessed the ascension of their Lord, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Whether, then, we see the smile of God from above, or listen to the glad notes of praisers below, we may highly appreciate public worship, and all its essential conveniences. If God delights in the assemblies of his people, and they find that it is good to wait upon him in his courts, then his courts, and all things else conducing to the worthy objects of such assemblings, have a relative and definite importance. Here is an argument which once called for the existence of the tabernacle, and then of the temple, and then of Jewish synagogues, and then, and now of Christian sanctuaries, and which asks yet for all such conveniences as shall tend to promote the blessed ends of public worship.

Under the old dispensation, besides the building of the tabernacle, the temple, and the synagogue, many things more were necessary in order that acceptable worship might be rendered. Under the new, which is a dispensation of more simplicity, not so

many things are essential, but what is essential or conducive to the end in view has a firm basis for the plea of its existence. Upon this basis we are willing to rest the claim of whatever may best be used in calling worshipping assemblies together. If such assemblies are proper, if a place in which to assemble is important, then some mode of calling the people together will be at least convenient, and this convenience will tend toward the pleasing of God and the blessing of men.

It will not be untimely for us as a congregation to be impressed with the fact to-day, that even what may seem so remote from the essentials of spiritual worship, as something by which the people may be assembled, is of much worth, is of enough worth to warrant its procurement.

Very early in the assemblings of men for worship, God himself appointed an instrumentality by which they were gathered together. We can not say how the patriarchs called their large families around them at the hours of morning and evening sacrifice, whether by oral announcement or otherwise. But when God was about to give his law to Israel from Sinai, among other directions given to Moses, bounds were to be set, so that the people might be kept from coming near the mount, until they should hear the sound of the trumpet. "When the trumpet soundeth long they shall come up to the mount." And so it was that when the lightnings blazed from the top of that smoking mountain and mighty thunderings rolled down its sides, the voice of the trumpet was heard afar off inviting the people to come up now if they would, and commune with Jehovah. The people were so afraid that they did not obey—mercy's notes did not mingle in the sound. They said unto Moses: "Speak thou with us, and we will hear." But it is an interesting fact, that God himself used a trumpet to call the people up, when they might receive his law and worship at his feet. And then it is another interesting fact, that soon after this, in the midst of directions for the tabernacle service was a special injunction to make and use this instrument. "Make thee two trumpets of silver: of a whole piece shalt thou make them, that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly. And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." "When the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm."

The use of the trumpet for this purpose seems to have been regarded as of divine appointment. Its notes from generation to generation were used to invite the people to an attention to the divine will, and to call them together for the rendering of gratitude and praise to God as their infinite benefactor. We can not enumerate the interesting instances of its use to which we are pointed in the Scriptures. Its sound must have been a hallowed

one. Its sacredness is yet regarded among the Jews, as they anticipate the day when they shall again hear its notes from mount Zion, to be taken up and echoed through all the world, calling the scattered wanderers of Israel home to their sacred city. And with the trumpet there may be cherished in all our minds very hallowed associations, since the second coming of Christ is to be announced by it, and the great assembly of the dead is to be convened at its call. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." And then John helps us to hear its echo, in the more distant vales of eternity, calling the redeemed to behold the wonders of heaven.

The trumpet was used generally in calling together religious assemblies to the time of Christ. It is difficult to tell when its use for such a purpose had ceased. For the first few centuries of the Christian era worshipers were very quietly convened. The Christian religion had not obtained such a freedom of privilege as would allow of any very open announcements. The places in which worshipers met were often the dens and caves of the earth, solitary places in the mountains, at best only private houses, known only to the faithful, and such others as were known to be favorably inclined toward the Christian faith. Invitations to these places were given from one to another in a quiet manner.

Precisely when bells were used for this purpose is scarcely ascertained. That small ones were used, both for religious and secular purposes, before the time of Christ is evident. As early as the days of Moses small tinkling instruments of some sort were hung to the priest's robe, which were intended to call the attention of worshipers to what was transpiring. In the days of the prophets they were used upon houses as ornaments. In making use of such a fact, the prophet Zechariah predicts the time when "Holiness unto the Lord" shall be written upon them.

Church-bells of any considerable size originated in Italy. The idea of their existence was suggested, it is thought, by the use that had been made of the small bells in the Jewish ceremonies. They were used first in summoning the people to the feasts of heathen deities. The feast of Osiris was announced by bells, and among the Greeks in Athens the priests made use of them in their sacrifices. It is evident that one was hung before the temple of Jupiter, the sound of which was revered as the voice of the God himself. Many amusing as well as absurd accounts of the power of bells over evil spirits are found here and there upon the pages of Mythology, and very similar ones have crept upon pages professedly Christian. "St. Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, in Campania, at the end of the fourth century, is said to have been the first to use bells in Christian churches to call the people to prayer." For a little time previous to this, wooden mallets had



been used in some instances, and in others two thin pieces of board were struck together, making a sharp sound, which is said to have been heard often for several miles. The custom of striking together these "sacred boards," as they are called, is yet observed by the Papal Church in some parts of Europe, during Passion-week, as being more suited to the solemnity of the season. Bells, however, were gradually introduced, and "the mallet" and "flat boards" gave way. In the sixth century bells were used pretty generally in the convents. They were introduced into France about the year 550. Pope Sebastian, about 580, first ordered that the hours of the day should be announced by striking the bell, that people might attend with more uniformity to the specified times of prayer. Some time in the eighth century the custom of naming and baptizing bells began, and in respect to this, as well as many other things external and ceremonious connected with religion, there have been such outrages of common-sense as have prejudiced not a few against religion itself.

The introduction of church-bells into England is first mentioned by Bede, about the close of the seventh century. There they seem to have originated that part of church architecture which affords them an elevation above the top of the main edifice, the tower at first being almost, if not quite, separate from the building. From the tenth to the twelfth century there grew up a spirit of rivalry between different churches and different countries in respect to the size of bells. At about the same time, too, there prevailed an opinion that the genuineness of a man's piety, and the probabilities of his salvation, depended upon the largeness of his gifts for religious purposes. And so, many persons of wealth procured and presented large bells to particular churches. And because of the wealthy vying with each other in this thing, it came to be that a single church became possessor of several bells. That all these might be used, has been thought to have been the origin of "chimes" or "peals," which have ever since been so much admired by the people of Britain and their descendants.

In respect to the size of bells—Russia has the preëminence, next is China, next Germany, next England, and then our own country. The largest of these "mountains of metal" is said to have weighed two hundred tons. It was twenty feet high, and twenty and a half in diameter. It was hung, but never swung. Its tongue was fourteen feet long and six feet in its greatest circumference, itself weighing more than our largest church-bells. It was rung by many men with ropes, drawing the tongue first in one direction and then in another against its sides. This bell now lies useless upon the earth, partly imbedded in sand by the side of the great Cathedral at Moscow. How long it will lie there, to tell of the folly of those who brought their precious metals from all parts of the empire to cast into the furnace from whence it came, we know

not. But it is a very palpable evidence of the tendency of human nature to extravagance. Thousands of things are useful, within the limitations of moderation, which are at heart demonstrating of folly when carried further. So it is with church-bells. When large enough to serve the convenience of those who would naturally come together to worship, where our human voice might lead the devotions, it is a blessing. When much larger, it clearly tells of other reasons for its existence than are harmonious with a genuine religion.

Our country has as yet but few faults in this direction. The largest one upon this continent is said to be at Montreal, weighing 29,400 pounds. Bells are generally small, and yet in most communities where there are people enough for a good-sized congregation, there is one or more of sufficient size to be heard for three or four miles around, and they are generally appreciated with no superstitious, improper regard. We say generally, because we know that in the Romish Church they are baptized often in the name of some Saint, and thus endowed with a supposed sanctity, which gives their notes a wonderful ability in chasing the devil from all hearts worshipping beneath it. Protestant churches have no such folly of notion. The Puritans in the old country were persecuted in part, because they thought and talked lightly of such "vain imaginations." And their descendants, in the colonies of New-England, for a time cared little about using bells, because of what had been associated with them in the nonsense of the Established Church in the old country. Hence it was that in many places they were dispensed with much longer than poverty dictated. The horn, the shell, and the base-drum, were much in use. Which of these it should be, was much according to the taste of the people. In farming communities, the stillness of Sabbath morning would be broken by the echoing notes of the horn, an instrument still used in many places in the south-west. In seaport places, the heavy vibrations of the conk-shell would roll along the shore. In places, where the military spirit largely prevailed, the animating notes of the base-drum called the people to an enlistment in the service of "the great Captain of salvation." Those whose office it was to blow, or to drum, had need of evincing a Puritanical punctuality, or the consequences would be severe. I remember of having read upon old church records the following: "*Resolved*, That Sergeant Jones be fined two shillings and sixpence for falling asleep on Sunday morning, and neglecting to beat the drum in time for meeting." By degrees, prejudice against the use of bells gave way, so that their sound was heard upon many a hill-side and in many a valley. Both in social and religious life, they came to be highly appreciated, and more and more so as they became identified with sweet and hallowed associations. At first they were procured from the mother coun-

try, but in later years they have been chiefly of American manufacture, and so easy of obtainment, that there goes forth from almost every village and country spire the inviting notes of the "church-going bell." The tolling of bells at the decease of persons was at first an expedient of superstition, in driving away demons, supposed to be after the spirit of the dead. They were often rung with violence during storms and tempests, to drive away evil spirits. Their general use in this country is not to be attributed to pride, nor to the prevalence of any such superstitious notions as have been cherished in connection with their existence in other times and countries, nor merely to an indefinite and common sense of propriety, but to an intelligently formed opinion of their actual worth, in promoting some of the best interests of men, whether individually, religiously, or socially considered.

Let us give a brief attention to some of the items of their usefulness, that we may be impressed with the fact that we as a community, and especially we as a congregation, have not been acting the part of wastefulness and folly in the expenditures that have been made in this direction. In considering the usefulness of church-bells, it may be proper to say: First, that they render a worthy claim for their existence in promoting the temporal welfare of communities where their voice is heard. This fact is distinctly seen in the contrast between villages where they exist, and where they do not. In the one there is an enterprise and activity which are not seen in the other. Let the notes of a cheerful, animating bell fall upon the ear of a people several times in a day, and there will hardly be there a vice-breeding pool of social stagnation. Every man's pulse will beat quicker, every man's face will shine brighter, and every man's step will be more elastic in going forth to the daily duties of life. There will also be a happying uniformity of habits among the people, and this will be promotive of a general sympathy. From the beginning to the close of each day, it will be pleasant for all to feel that they are each the elements of a common uniformity. There will be a health-promoting regularity in respect to eating and sleeping. If the bell is rung with reference to these things, it will be likely to be timed according to the experience of wisdom, and not as indolent and vicious inclinations might dictate. It will be likely to promote early rising in the morning, starting up the naturally indolent, who otherwise might lose much of the most precious part of the day. It will send the laborer punctually to his toil, promoting thus his happiness and the good of his employer. It will tell the housekeeper when she may soon expect those for whom she provides at the middle of the day, and thus prevent a fretfulness of evil influence in domestic life. It may start up and send home, at a seasonable hour in the evening, some who are worse than carelessly lounging in public places—thus bringing relief to the solici-

tous hearts of wives and mothers, and promoting a general quietude through the place, which will permit the general enjoyment of peaceful rest. In times of special joy, and in days of general jubilee, when the spirit of patriotism ought to have an exultant manifestation, it may happily help in answering the demands of propriety. For this kind of service some of the old bells of revolutionary times, like that in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, have been almost immortalized. We can conceive of many ways in which bells may thus be promotive of the general good. They are justly regarded by many as such an index of the condition of a community, that where they are not found, where there are evidently people and wealth enough to procure them, just there is no place desirable for a home. Even the vicious, and the profane, and the terribly irreligious, are heard to declare, with oaths of positiveness, as they will say of places where there are no churches, that they will never be caught there longer than will be necessary in getting a good foothold to run out. A town that thinks any thing of its temporal prosperity and reputation, will not long do without the quickening and harmonizing influence of a good bell.

But, secondly, the worth of a bell is perhaps still more evident when we consider its use for religious purposes. The general welfare so runs into and promotes the religious, that it is difficult to tell precisely when an influence ceases to be secular, and begins to be sacred. Any thing that promotes the worthy objects of domestic and social life is a blessed auxiliary of the Christian religion; its influence is more or less religious in its tendency. So we may say of the church-bell; but it has an influence still more direct, when used for purposes specifically religious. The ways of its usefulness, when calling the people together for worship, are easily seen.

(1.) It calls attention to the claims of God for love and service. Nothing is more manifest than that men are apt to become careless in respect to these claims. So many things are pressed upon their attention—things naturally interesting, things of captivating and even of intoxicating power over human nature as it is—that they forget God and become careless of his demands. They do not realize what he righteously requires of them. They do not take time to think of what even nature may teach concerning him, who created and sustains all things. They do not quietly listen to the dictates of reason and conscience, concerning the reciprocity proper toward a Being upon whom they are so perpetually dependent. Of course, they will not naturally find time to pore over the lessons of revelation. They will be likely to be so devoted to the world, that the notes of the bell, announcing the hour of prayer in the week-time, will be as a voice from the sky, announcing that God has claims. No doubt more than the few who obey these notes are thus helped to profitable and restraining suggestions; and then there will naturally be such a devotion to

worldly interests through the week, that the mere fact that the Sabbath has come, with its still and hallowed influence, will not quicken to such a use of its sacred hours as will best promote the infinite interest of those to whom these hours are given. There will be a need of something that shall break this stillness, and arouse the stupid, and at the same time properly direct both intellectual and physical activity. The church-bell can at least in part supply this want. It can speak for God as no other voice can. Its voice is the most general of any in the community. It can reach the ear of him who is so fatigued with his worldliness, that he is yet in his bed when he ought to be preparing for the sanctuary. It can send a thrill of guiltiness along the threads of his consciousness. It can make the man stop and think who is carelessly sauntering over the fields. It can make his pen tremble, who is posting his books on the Sabbath, so that he will think he had better lay it aside. It can send weakness to the muscle of him who prosecutes his worldly toil on the Lord's day. Thus, in various ways, it can be useful in calling the attention of all, when its voice is heard, to the claims which the true God presents for love and service.

But then again, (2,) it is useful in promoting a larger attendance upon the services of the sanctuary, than would be secured but for its influence. If such services are profitable, that which will increase the number of those attending upon them is important. There are, of course, persons in every place who will in no manner be induced to go to the sanctuary. A congregation may have very excellent conveniences of all kinds, and still but few comparatively avail themselves of their use. But other things being equal, it is reasonable to expect that when the notes of the inviting bell are heard, then the larger number will be assembled for worship; for as we have already seen, many a careless one will be aroused to think of God's claims, and so be induced to find his way to the house of the Lord. Many of us no doubt can call to mind times when we would not have gone with others to the morning services of the sanctuary, but for the quickening and inspiring influence of the bell; and at evening, too, when comfortably situated at home, how often we would have remained so but for the same influence! The habit of obedience to the bell, too, starts us whenever its sound falls upon the ear. We seem to see others thronging the way, and think we must join them, or be disobedient to a very imperative call.

And then again, (3,) added to an increase of attendants, the bell promotes punctuality. We do not say that wherever there is a bell, all will be punctual; for we have seen the existence of the contrary; nor that where there is no bell there may not be a good degree of punctuality. But certainly this excellence of a congregation is likely to be promoted by the bell. Time-pieces may differ, but as many persons are within hearing of the bell,



they can know when the services will commence, and the greater the comparative number of those present punctually at that time, the better the objects of public worship will be promoted. Every worshiper needs what are termed the preliminary services, as a preparation for the enjoyment of what follows; and every worshiper already there needs to be undisturbed by the coming in of his fellow-worshippers. Sometimes persons will come into the sanctuary so late as to give the impression that they have come very reluctantly, or that they have supposed that all going before the sermon has been attended to, on purpose to give them time to come in, or that they would have all the congregation in to mark their splendid appearance. To correct such a misjudgment, and the habit inducing it, is to do good, both to individuals and the congregation with which they are connected. Blessed is the bell that has such an office to fulfill! I can say for one, that for the sake of my personal enjoyment and profit through all the day, I would not miss the first voluntary of the choir upon the Sabbath. Instances of lateness will unavoidably occur once in a while; but when they do occur, they should be of as little disturbance to the general quietude as possible. Let the bell be as promptly obeyed as may be.

But again, (4,) the bell is useful in the influence it has in preparing the minds of those who obey its call for worship. If its tones are what they should be, a soothing, quieting influence upon the people will be manifest. Have you ever noticed the difference in the demeanor of a congregation coming together at the call of a bell, from that of a people assembling without any such call? In the one case all will seem calm and thoughtful, as if they were really coming up at the divine invitation to reverence and adore the great Author of all their mercies. In the other there will be boisterousness and carelessness, as if there were entertained by many no adequate conception of the object of Sabbath assemblies. Nothing has yet arrested the tide of worldliness. It has about as full a flow as it had during the week. The notes of a good bell would very quickly quiet those boisterous ones, and so impart a solemn and thoughtful step, with which to enter the gates of Zion. The worth of a bell can never be estimated in respect to this kind of influence, until we can learn the infinite importance of a preparation of the mind to receive the impressions of truth. But it must be of no trifling consideration.

Again, (5,) the bell is useful because of the sacred associations connected with its sound, and the hallowed memories its notes inspire. Here we enter a field so large and rich, that we will have time for scarcely a general survey. The worth of the bell in these respects increases with the number of our years—increases, too, with the age of the bell, especially if it has any thing peculiar in its notes. Let a man have passed the meridian of life, and he will scarcely hear the notes of any bell without being

brought into such a thoughtfulness as can but be profitable. If he can then hear the same bell which rolled its peculiarities upon the ear of his childhood, the impression will be still stronger and better.

To associate things with each other, is to obey a natural law of the human mind. Without going into a consideration of those metaphysical reasonings which have attempted to explain the philosophy of this law, reasonings not so easily understood by the common mind as the law itself, it is sufficient for our purpose simply to mention the fact that there is such a connection or similarity of things with each other in the apprehension of the mind, that the presence of the one will suggest the other, or it may be many others. The presence, or even the thought of one man will suggest others to you with whom you know him to be intimate. The memento given you by some friend who, it may be, has long since gone to his rest, will bring that friend to your mental presence. You can see his face; you can hear his voice; you can be impressed in one way or another by the general sum of his worth. If you visit your native place, and see the streams and hills with which you were familiar in childhood, a thousand interesting incidents will come hovering round, like so many gently knocking messengers. If your childhood was a happy, worthy one, you can be greatly blessed by that law of association which has bound up and brought to you such a bundle of the past. Parents might find a profitable hint here concerning the surroundings they should give to their children if they would make more than their early days happy; and then what if this law shall live forever! How important that first associations be proper, so that whatever shall suggest the things of early life, shall introduce a train that will be worthy of a place in the mind amid the rich things of eternity! With the notes of the church-going bell must necessarily be associated many of the most profitable things of life. The bell does not ring just for the sake of ringing; it has many an earnest purpose. Those who hear it know what these are. With its sound these things are indissolubly connected. So much may be said of its general use, while there have been special occasions when its notes have mingled with Providential voices in echoes which will never die in the deep recesses of the soul.

How intimately connected these things are, might be abundantly instanced. For example, a child, well-trained in New-England, with large hopes of wealth, left his father's house for a seafaring life. He became one of the most wild of the sons of the ocean; he very rarely visited his native land, and never his early home; he seemed almost without natural affection; he cared little for the few books found on ship-board, and least of all for the Bible, which had been furnished by a charitable society in London. But one day while the sailors were sportfully passing away a dull hour or two, a steel bar chanced to be suspended, and was acci-

dentally struck, and then again and again, purposely for amusement. All became more and more merry, save one, who, when the first notes of that bar fell upon his ear, turned away to seek the most retired place the ship afforded. But still he heard that sound, so very like the one which came down from the tower beneath which he was taught to worship. He was constrained to live over the past as he had not been for many years. He thought, and thought, until induced to pray. The Bible became to him the richest of all treasures; and a something in his nature could not be satisfied until he had come to his native town and listened again and again to the same bell which rolled its notes of rich-freighted associations upon his ears in early life. Well, another man had gone, with other scramblers, for wealth to California. He had been subject to the general influences of the mining districts for years. Being naturally conformative in characteristics, he had astonishingly changed from respectability of appearance and morality of habits to a terrible roughness of the one, and a more terrible condition of the other. Even his constant associates both dreaded and loathed him. When he came down to Sacramento for purposes of dissipation and sin, he was looked upon as the most terrible specimen of the human wolf ever seen even there. At length Sabbath morning came, and a church bell which had there recently come, sent forth its invitations to worship. Who would have thought such a beast of a man would have cared for it? But those notes so affected him, that to avoid being observed, he sought a solitary place just out of the city, and there remained through all the day. A few months afterward a glad and happy family in one of the towns of an Eastern State welcomed its head, and with gratitude to God was told the blessed power of that Sabbath-bell. That happy, grateful man told his pastor that that day, in the hearing of that bell, was at first the most sad and then the most joyous day of his life. Tears of the deepest penitence had flown; prayers the most sincere and importunate had been offered; purposes the most solemn and sacred had been formed ere that bell, at evening, sweetly announced the hour of prayer. Its notes then seemed like the whisper of an angel, while in the morning they fell on the guilty ear as if they were the severe utterances of the trump of doom. Now, these are substantial verities to which you know might be added others. Have you ever had an experience in any degree similar? Have any of you ever heard the old bell again, after many years of absence from under its sound? How vain it would be for me to attempt to tell of all it would suggest! But I venture to say that it brought to your minds some of the most profitable meditations you ever thought upon. If you were alone in your chamber when you heard it, or if you were coming over some hill-top where you could look down upon the valley, and its notes came up to meet you, we would think it strange if it did not bring you

to one of the most "solemn pauses" of life. Did it not roll up to your view again some of those Sabbath mornings which blessed your early days? Did it not assemble around you the congregation with which you worshiped years ago? Could you not see and hear the man who uttered Gospel invitations on your careless youthful ear? Did not its last lingering notes again bring before you those funeral processions which once were obedient to its mournful tones? Couldn't you almost see the hearse that bore your mother, or your sister, or your most intimate associate, to the resting-place of the dead? In short, could not you then think of much which nothing else for many years had suggested? And could you scarcely refrain from then making some noble purpose for your future? This law of association certainly gives to the church-bell a very hallowed, sacred worth. By this law, its influence may be carried far into the latest periods of life. Oh! this law may transport its influence far beyond the valley of death. For aught I know, there will be some note in the song of the redeemed, some musical wave borne upon the breath of that world, that will suggest the remembrance of that bell which first invited us to hear of redemption; and then will pass, in bright and blessed review, all the train of gracious influences which bore us toward heaven. Has not the bell been a blessing if we gladly hear its notes again upon the eternal hills? Have not the least doubt but in the final account we each will render will be an item concerning the use we have made of the invitations presented by the Sabbath-bell. It certainly speaks for God, and he who does not heed it is guilty. He who obeys, will be rewarded both here and hereafter. It is a matter of interest among us to-day, that a new bell has called us together. The old one, whose faithful voice some of you have heard so long, will speak to you no more; but it will be thought of far, far hence. It has come down to the dust, and will speak no more until it has undergone a transforming influence. Many who have heard it have already gone to render an account for the way they have treated that Gospel to which it invited them; others will soon follow. There are those present who will have but few hallowed associations connected with the bell just hung. Among its first utterances, it may tell that their probation has ended. But it would not be a wonder if some are present who shall hear its various calls for many years. Some of your most valuable associations, I hope, will be connected with its existence. May it help in forming your habits in ordinary life. May it induce you to a remembrance of the Sabbath, and a prompt attendance upon the sanctuary. May it bring you where you shall learn and do the Divine will. May it call you where you will hear and accept of a Saviour. May it remind you of death, and the need of a preparation for it. May its notes, falling upon you, often seem as accents from the throne of God, asking that you lay up your treasures higher than earth. Oh! may a multi-

tude of us in the temple above rejoice that this bell, with other temporal mercies, have been so sanctified to our good, that we can "join the ceaseless song in the endless Sabbath of our God."

## SERMON XXXIV.

### BREVITY OF LIFE.\*

"THERE is but a step between me and death."—1 SAMUEL 20 : 3.

THESE are the words of David when pursued by Saul. They express his vivid sense of the peril in which he stood every hour. That jealous monarch was bent upon his destruction, and left no means unemploy'd to reach him and strike him down. He was hunted like a partridge in the mountains. Like Paul, he died daily. His life was in constant peril, and he realized it. He felt that his next step might be into eternity. And what David so fully realized, is true of all men now living, is true of each one here before me. Though we are exposed to no such visible danger as that which stared him in the face, yet each one of us may say truly, as he did: "There is but a step between me and death." The theme suggested by these words, and appropriate to this day, is the *brevity of life*. We are spending the last Sabbath of another year; soon its completed record will be in the book of remembrance that lies before the throne above, to meet us at the last day; and let us pause in life's busy career, and consider how brief the space that separates us from that last day. The Bible abounds with most striking representations of the brevity of life. It is compared to the vapor which appeareth for a little time and then vanishes. It is called a moment. Our days are said to be as an hand-breadth and our age as nothing. Even though life be prolonged to fourscore years, it is in that case said to be soon cut off. The frailty of life is illustrated too by the grass, which in the morning flourisheth and groweth up, and in the evening is cut down and withereth. And the Scriptures not only teach us the brevity of life but its extreme uncertainty. We may not boast ourselves of to-morrow, for we know not what a day may bring forth. Though we see no such cause operating to peril our life as David saw, yet we know not any more than he did the day, or the hour, or the way in which death will overtake us.

Of the hundreds who entered that train of cars at St. Louis for an excursion over the Pacific Railroad, not one perhaps thought that death was so near—that so soon the fatal plunge would be made that would launch them into eternity. As little do we know how near death may now be to us. The counsel of God,

\* Preached on the last Sabbath of the year. Unfortunately the author's name is not found on the MS.—EDITOR.



repeated with great frequency and emphasis, is, Watch, be ready; for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the son of man cometh. Let the loins be girded about, and the lights burning, and be like men that wait for their Lord; that when he comes and knocks, they may open unto him immediately; that when he says, "So I come quickly," they may respond: "Even so come, Lord Jesus." In such arresting and impressive terms, does God teach us in his word the brevity and uncertainty of life.

1. Life, I observe, in the first place, appears brief if compared with the wishes and plans of men. Their prevailing thought is: To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant. So they would have it. They are disposed to put far away the evil day of death—to thrust it into the distant and dark future—out of sight and out of mind. Their plans are formed in anticipation of long life. They say, "To-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city and continue a year, and buy and sell and get gain," with as much confidence of success in all their plans, as if they had been assured by Him in whose hand their breath is that life should not fail. The rich man whose grounds brought forth plentifully, formed his plan of enlarging his barns, with the wish and the confident expectation of living to enjoy his abundance many years. The thought did not enter his mind, that his soul might be required of him that night; that he might so soon be summoned away from his treasures on earth. And he was no more thoughtless of death than the great mass of mankind. Even when disease takes strong and relentless hold upon the earthly house of tabernacle to dissolve it; when the infallible signs of approaching death are manifest to others; when the steps are just about to take hold on death, it is often difficult, sometimes impossible, to convince the victim of disease that his case is hopeless, or that he is really in any danger. Compared with men's wishes and plans for life, it is indeed short—but a moment, a step.

2. The extreme brevity of life appears, if compared with that eternity for which it is our only season of preparation. It was while Paul was looking at things not seen and eternal, that the trials of life seemed light, and but for a moment. O eternity! eternity! how much of solemn interest to man is comprised in that one word—a world without end—a world of retribution too; when men will reap as they now sow; when after millions of centuries shall have elapsed, the immortal spirit will have made not the least approach to the end of its being. How short, how like a vapor, a moment, a step does the longest life appear, compared with eternity! How does the age of man dwindle to nothing in the comparison! And the fact that the close of life is the opening of eternity, that life, short as it is, is our only scene of preparation for it, is what gives to the Bible view of life its peculiar solemnity.

3. Life is short, compared with the great work to be done in

the way of preparation for eternity. The brief space of life is to every man the valley of decision, in which the great question of life or death for eternity is settled. The working out of our own salvation is no easy task; the training of a depraved mind for that heaven which God has revealed is a work of extreme difficulty. The righteous are represented as "scarcely saved." The Christian life is compared to a warfare, to a race, is represented by those feats of strength and skill in which the physical power of men were tasked to the very utmost. He who would come off conqueror at last, and wear a crown of life, must fight the good fight of faith. He who would win the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, must lay "aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset him, and run with patience the race set before him;" "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before;" he must press toward the mark with all his energies. He who would reign with Christ above must suffer with him now, must crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, must die unto sin and live unto righteousness. It is only through much tribulation that the kingdom of heaven can be entered. And all this difficult work of making the calling and election sure, of preparing the soul for the experience of a happy eternity with God, must be done while the lamp of life holds out to burn, before the vapor vanishes away. The work, how vast! the time, how short!

And what must be the practical influence of this truth realized? Let any individual realize that there is but a step between him and death, between him and those scenes to which death will introduce him, and how will it lead him to act?

1. I answer, first, it tends to make men feel their accountability to God. The prisoner awaiting trial feels most solicitude about the result of his trial, as the hour assigned for it draws near, when the clock begins to strike that hour. So the man who properly realizes the brevity of life, that his trial before the great white throne is near at hand, that the books will soon be opened, the witnesses heard, and his case decided for eternity, will most deeply feel his accountability. The great idea that will govern him will be that of stewardship. The reason why men live with so little sense of personal responsibility to God is, that they regard him as a God afar off, and not near at hand. In the blindness of unbelief, they say: "How doth God know, and is, then, knowledge with the Most High?" The final judgment, if not utterly denied, is thrown so far off into the future, as to have little or no influence. Just let men realize that another step may bring them before the bar of God, and how will their sense of accountability be quickened!

2. A proper sense of the brevity of life will stimulate men to the cultivation of holiness, to the supreme pursuit of those objects that are of greatest value, will lead them to set their affections on

things above, and not on things on the earth. Let the truth be realized that the Judge standeth at the door; that soon we shall meet him as our reconciled friend, or our eternal foe; that we must soon hear from his lips the welcome of the righteous, or the doom of the wicked; that we shall soon be reaping in eternity according to our sowing here; and with what force will it constrain us to follow after holiness; to let our moderation be known in the minding of earthly things! How carefully will it lead us to search our hearts, and cleanse them of every wrong affection towards God or man; to put away every element of character that can not be transferred to heaven!

3. A proper sense of the brevity of life is a very powerful guard against temptation. He who realizes that the day of the Lord is near; that very soon time with him will be no longer; that there is but a step between him and death, is armed with a mighty power to resist temptation. Is he tempted to waste his time in the pursuit of vanity? he has not a moment to spare from the great work of life. His sense of the brevity of life makes it seem precious, and constrains him to "redeem the time," to rescue every precious moment from waste. Realizing that there is but a step between him and that judgment into which God will bring every work with every secret thing, temptation is in a great measure disarmed of its power over him. The man who feels the chill of death upon him; that his earthly house of tabernacle is about to be dissolved, and his spirit to ascend to God, feels no very great interest in those objects that fatally engross so many minds. Could you have stood by that worldling of whom we read in the Gospel, after he heard the startling announcement, "This night shall thy soul be required of thee," and talked with him about his abundant wealth and his worldly pleasures; what interest could he have felt in such topics? What charms had the world for him, under summons, as he was to leave it immediately? What were all the wealth, and glory, and luxury of Babylon to Belshazzar, as he stood pale and trembling before the mysterious hand-writing on his palace-wall, revealing his awful doom? In whatever degree any man realizes the brevity of life, and has the eye of faith open and fixed upon eternal realities; in that degree will worldly objects lose their power to draw him away from God; in that degree will he be fortified against the dangerous power of the world.

4. A proper sense of the brevity of life tends to render us watchful and prayerful, to draw the heart to the throne of grace. Peter's exhortation to be sober and watch unto prayer was enforced by the solemn truth, that the end of all things is at hand; and in whatever degree this truth is realized, it seems to promote a spirit of vigilance, and sobriety, and prayer, to lead men to walk humbly with God. The servant who feels bound to be at his post when his master comes, who would not be any where else, and who knows not the hour when his master will come, but realizes that it is near

and may be the next hour, has the strongest inducement to be in a wakeful and waiting posture.

5. A proper sense of the brevity of life tends to promote the faithful discharge of duty in all the various relations of life. It is a powerful motive to parents to train up their children for Christ and heaven. Let the parent realize that life is a vapor; that soon his own head will be laid in the dust; and that the dear children of his love are liable, at any moment, to be taken by death out of the reach of parental influence, and he will feel the pressure of a powerful motive to do what his hand findeth to do for their salvation with his might. This truth realized, tends to promote Christian fidelity toward all around us, to prevent weariness in well-doing. Jesus enjoins upon each one not only to seek his own salvation, but that of others; not only to have light himself, but to let his light shine before men that they may be led by its influence to glorify God and enjoy him forever. The privilege of winning souls to Christ, of converting sinners from the error of their ways, and saving souls from death, is offered to all. But the days in which this can be done are as an hand-breadth. What you do for your family, or for your neighbors, or for the community in which you dwell, or for your country, or for the world, must be done quickly. The influence you exert in making known the unsearchable riches of Christ to them that sit in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death, must be exerted soon. The present generation of heathen are hastening rapidly to us, across the narrow isthmus of time, sending to us their dying cry for help. All that can be done to lead the millions of this generation to the saving knowledge of Christ, must be done soon. Let this be realized, and it will serve to make us steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

6. A proper sense of the brevity of life tends to promote patience under the trials and burdens of life. These burdens are to be borne only for a little season. The way through the desert is short, and will soon be finished. Our light affliction is but for a moment compared with that eternity for which it is sent to prepare us. "Yet a little while, and He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." He will come and receive His people to Himself, to that heavenly place where He has gone to prepare for them; will come to give them sweet relief from all life's burdens; to put an end to all their griefs; to wipe away all tears from their eyes. The believing children of Christ may look up and lift up their heads, for their redemption draweth nigh. They are summoned to awake out of sleep by the precious consideration that now is their salvation nearer than where they believed. The space between the believer and his rest is short, and rapidly diminishing. This truth realized, sustained and animated the apostles in all their stern duties and trials, rendering them patient in tribulation. Heaven was to them a precious reality, and it was near at hand.

Its light shone upon them; its spirit animated them; its breezes fanned them. They breathed its atmosphere, and though sorrowful, they were always rejoicing, smiling through their tears, rejoicing in their prisons, glorying in their tribulation; and the influence of this truth will be the same upon every believer in proportion to the clearness with which it is realized.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If there is but a step between us and death; if "a point of time, a moment's space, removes us to yon heavenly place, or shuts us up in hell;" and if a proper sense of their truth has the practical influence ascribed to it, then are we forced to the inference that but few realize it, almost none of those to whom it pertains. What is the course of this world? Does it not appear very much as if they thought they should live here always, as if they had here an abiding-place—a continuing city? Are not the days, and weeks, and months, and years of life, suffered to pass in as utter neglect of all serious preparation for eternity, as if there were no eternity? When shall we begin to act as if it were true that there is but a step between us and death? When shall we begin to live for eternity?

2. The term of life, though brief, is not too short to prepare for eternity, if it be rightly improved. It is fixed by infinite wisdom and love, and is sufficient for all who are disposed to make a right use of it, and yet in the longest life there is not a moment to waste. The period of life is never too short to meet the desire of God's children, while they act truly in character. For them to die is gain, to depart is to be with Christ, and is far better, as Paul thought, than to linger here. And those who are resolved to waste life, can not rationally wish for a long life—a short life is long enough to spend in sin. The longer the period during which a sinner despises the riches of God's goodness and forbearance, and long-suffering, the more fearful the weight of wrath he will treasure up against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. One who is determined to waste life in neglect of Christ, has reason to wish that life may be short.

Finally; if there is but a step between us and death, how important that we all seek and secure divine aid in taking that step! Soon we shall find ourselves beyond the river of death, knowing by experience, joyous or sad, the eternal issues of life, finding fullness of joy in the presence of God, or lying down in endless sorrow. What shall be the eternal issue of life? is the question we are now deciding. This last Sabbath of the year, like the fifty-one Sabbaths that have preceded it, is helping to decide it; and will not each one be persuaded to turn the heart to God, to come boldly to the throne of grace, and obtain mercy and grace to help us in time of need, that the step between us and death may be taken safely, happily, usefully, and lead to a blessed eternity with God?



